

**Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 23, 2023**

**House Bill 6659: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS
THEREFOR.**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Diane Murphy, I am a resident of Wethersfield, and I am an Education Consultant in the State Department of Education (SDE). I offer the following testimony regarding the state budget:

A properly funded state budget is necessary to ensure that the services provided by me and my fellow state employees are delivered effectively and efficiently. When we are given the resources and support we need, state employees do it better, faster, and for less than anyone else.

I work in the Performance Office at the State Department of Education. My role is to support the collection, analysis and reporting of all special education data. I have served in this role for over 20 years. Currently, my work centers around supporting the new CT Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS), ensuring the collection of all federally required data and using that data to report state and district compliance with federal and state laws associated with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Restraint and Seclusion and the implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) for the over 80,000 students with disabilities across the state. In addition, I serve on the board for the Special Education Data Managers Affiliate Group (SEDMAG) – for the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) – representing data managers for all 58 states and territories responsible for ensuring the implementation of IDEA. Finally, I am the President of the P-3A Council of CSEA – representing the amazing professionals who serve Connecticut in the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind; Bureau of Rehabilitation Services; Connecticut Technical Education and Career System; Department of Administrative Services; Office of Early Childhood; and State Department of Education.

I am here today to implore you to not only fully fund the State Department of Education's proposed budget, but to express the desperate need to fill all vacant positions within the SDE, including those positions that may have expired due to inability to fill those in a timely manner. Throughout the early 2000's, the number of professional staff working to support the work of the SDE numbered around 175. Through budget cuts, position eliminations during tight budget years, and most recently the extraordinary number of retirements of our members, the professional members at the SDE number fewer than 115. During COVID – the SDE lost 30 percent of its professional staff employed to carry out the work of implementing all federal and state education laws; processing and monitoring all education based federal and state grants; collecting and reporting on all education data related to district staff, students and the health and learning growth of our state's children. New curricular mandates passed by this legislature cannot be implemented and supported without the work of our Academic Office professionals who draft and refine curriculum and standards. New educators, desperately needed in school districts throughout the state, cannot be licensed and employed without the proper review and certification by the Talent Office. Education funds cannot be expended without staff to process the grants and monitor the federal and state regulations

associated with their lawful use. Families and communities cannot fully understand the effectiveness of the education their children receive without the collection, analysis and public reporting of data associated with all areas of teaching and learning and the supports required to be in place for our students' physical and mental health needs. Adult education students cannot enter new training programs or obtain jobs without staff to issue diplomas and process transcripts and at times, these requests are urgent and the needs are immediate. For example, this week's sudden closure of Stone Academy prompted additional transcript requests by students desperately seeking the ability to transfer to new training programs and continue their learning.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund was created by Congress in March 2020 as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The ESSER Fund consists of federal dollars allotted to help state education departments and school districts throughout the country combat the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on students and K-12 education as a whole. As well, further federal funding from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) supported educational relief for Connecticut totaling nearly 1.7 billion dollars in one-time education funding (<https://schoolstatefinance.org/issues/esser-funding>). Processing the ESSER and ARP Grants required staff to create applications, review all paperwork associated with those applications, and process and execute contracts and grants in a timely manner so that school districts could expend funds to implement their activities designed to support our students' needs. Low staffing levels potentially compromise this important system.

The hiring crisis facing the state of Connecticut is not an unanticipated issue. This legislature commissioned at least two separate studies to ascertain the potential impact of the looming retirements in 2022. One of the outcomes of those studies was the consolidation of all Human Resources departments under DAS – which was touted to ensure a smoother and easier hiring process. However, this consolidation did not relieve or circumvent the projected backlog of vacancies, in fact, it only served to make the hiring process more complicated and difficult to complete. We have positions that have been vacant for more than two years that are just now being posted. We have positions that are approved but expire before any next steps are completed and candidates are asked to reapply. We have many positions that simply have not yet been posted. None of this is a reflection on the hard work of the state's human resources employees, they are as understaffed as the rest of us and simply cannot keep up.

We are in a staffing crisis. Our agency is significantly understaffed in all areas and departments and yet we continue to take on more and more new work from both federal mandates and one-time funding as well as through the passage of new mandates by CT's legislature. Our state's HR is too understaffed to support our agency to address the employee void. We need solutions now, as this continued staffing crisis is only starting to show itself through our inability to adequately support our districts and thereby the students and families of Connecticut.

I am proud to work for the people of Connecticut and ask you to craft a budget that makes needed investments in public services, the people who provide them, and the residents who rely on them.

Diane Murphy
Wethersfield, CT